Boko Haram - Nigeria’s Nightmare

What is the issue?

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- ‘Boko Haram’ (a terrorist organisation in Nigeria) had recently attacked a couple of villages in northern Nigeria and killed more than a dozen people.
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- The group also engages in regularly kidnapping school girls form the disturbed north-eastern towns of Nigeria – which is proving to be agonising.
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What is the history of Boko Haram’s Rise?

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- **Cultural Riots -** The 2002 ‘Miss World pageant’ was initially planned to be organised in the Nigerian capital city of Abuja.
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- But the event was shifted to London due to security concerns arising out of religious tensions against the event.
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- The pretext was that ‘many Nigerian Muslims saw the event as an affront to their culture and perception of feminine modesty’.
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- Large-scale rioting and violence was particularly intense in the northern towns and more than 200 people were killed.
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- While the Boko Haram existed since the 1990s, it was during these riots that it gained prominence under the leadership of radical cleric ‘Mohammed Yusuf’.
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- Based mainly based in northeast Nigeria, the group is also active in the neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger and Cameroon.

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- **Ideology -** In the “Hausa language” that is commonly spoken in northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram literally means “Western education is forbidden”.
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- The group despises anything that may be considered Western, including the established norms of liberal democracy.
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- As a consequence, it considers the Nigerian state an enemy, and wants an Islamic state governed by the Quranic principles and Shariat.
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- Significantly, in 2015, Boko Haram had pledged its allegiance to the ISIS.
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How notorious has the group been?

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- Boko Haram had frequently staged armed attacks and bombings since its early days, but it was only in 2009 that the international community took notice.
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- **Violence -** In July 2009, Boko Haram carried out a spate of attacks on churches and government infrastructure and killed scores of policemen.
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- Hundreds of civilians and more than 700 terrorists are said to have died in the clashes that followed between security forces and Boko Haram.
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- While several top leaders including the organisation’s founder ‘Yusuf’ were said to have been assassinated, the group soon found a new leader in ‘Shekau’.
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- In 2014 alone, Boko Haram was responsible for 6,644 deaths, which is even higher than Islamic State’s (IS) 6,073 during the same period.
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- **Kidnapping -** UNICEF has recently stated that “Boko Haram” had kidnapped more than 1,000 children since 2013 and abductions continue unabbated.
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- Notably, the statement comes almost 4 years after 276 girls were kidnapped from a boarding school in a north-eastern town in Nigeria.
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- More recently, in February this year, it was reported that nearly 110 girls were missing following an attack by the group in another north-east Nigerian

town.
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What are the factors responsible for Boko Haram’s rise?

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- Rise of Boko Haram is partly due to the failure of the Nigerian government to improve the socio-economic conditions of the people in north-east Nigeria.
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- While the north-east has historically suffered discrimination, discovery of oil in the south and the subsequent progress there has aggravated the situation.
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- Notably, the north was under the rule of ‘Muslim Emeritus’ under British protectorate – much like our pre-independent princely states.
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- While the Muslim majority north held on to its conservatism, the Christian majority south was under direct British rule and embraced western education.
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- Hence, the south had progressed academically and managed better earning potential while the north had a large chunk of illiterate population.
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- These demographic factors hence provide for a ripe ground that supports Boko Haram’s ideological propaganda and recruitment strategy.
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How does the future look?

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- Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin (all that are threatened directly by Boko Haram) had joined to form a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).
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- The force has existed since 1994, but its mandate was extended in 2012 to give it more teeth to take on multiple jihadist groups in the region.
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- These efforts have succeeded in trimming the outfit’s influence by restricting its activities and geographical reach greatly.
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- There are also reports of a new internal power struggle that is brewing

within the organisation.
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- Yet, despite all these, the organisation’s potency is still very menacing and needs concerted action to neutralise it.
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Source: Indian Express

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